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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: DAGESTAN: ATTENTION FOCUSED ON CONTINUED VIOLENCE  
AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Alice G. Wells; reason 1.4  
(d)

11. (C) Summary: The Moscow-based human rights organization Memorial has begun to focus more attention on the simmering violence that permeates Dagestan, one of Russia's most unstable regions. At a November 24 press conference, Memorial head Oleg Orlov said the situation in Dagestan is as bad as in neighboring Chechnya and nearby Ingushetiya. Mothers of Dagestan founder Svetlana Isayeva said that there is a civil war going on there with people dying every day. Dagestan's president Mukhu Aliyev has taken a page out of the playbook of recently replaced Ingushetiya president Murat Zyazikov in blaming the republic's problems on the West; failure by Aliyev to take more effective action to stem the violence might ultimately cost him his job. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Dagestan, the most populous of Russia's northern Caucasus republics, remains one of its most unstable. According to the Moscow-based human rights organization Memorial, during the summer of 2008, eleven members of Russian federal law enforcement serving in Dagestan were killed and another 13 were wounded. In contrast, during the same period in neighboring Chechnya 33 were killed and 70 wounded; and in nearby Ingushetiya (with a far smaller population) 29 were killed and 75 wounded. During a November 24 press conference, Memorial's head Oleg Orlov noted, however, that beginning in September there was a significant and alarming increase in the nature of the violence in Dagestan, where the conflict had a religious character. According to Orlov, in September 2008, federal forces undertook two special operations in Dagestan that resulted in the deaths of ten suspected insurgents, including several of the purported leaders of the insurgency. On November 16, police killed four suspected militants in a gunfight in the capital of Makhachkala after a gunfight that lasted several hours. Orlov said that in response to increased activity by law enforcement, insurgents have targeted officers of federal forces, killing five majors, one lieutenant colonel and one colonel since September.

13. (SBU) At a November 20 conference in Makhachkala on "Countering Ethnic and Political Extremism in Dagestan," Minister of Internal Affairs Adilgeriy Magomedtagirov said that there were seven terrorist cells comprised of from seven to 15 people each (or a total of 100 terrorists) operating in Dagestan. He also said that the ministry has a list of 1,370 people in Dagestan considered to be "Wahhabists." (Note: "Wahhabism" is banned in Dagestan. End Note) This is the second such conference held in Dagestan; the first was in June 2007. Memorial representative Yekaterina Sokiryanskaya, who had recently returned from Dagestan, said that the list was made up of persons who attend ultra-conservative Salafist mosques in Dagestan. She added that if your name appears on the list, you have little choice but to "go to the mountains."

Illegal Detentions Spawn Unlawful Prosecutions

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14. (SBU) Orlov and Sokiryanskaya implied that federal and local law enforcement operating in Dagestan had not learned from the mistakes over the past several years by their colleagues in Chechnya and Ingushetiya. According to them, law enforcement officers were abducting suspects and, in some cases, torturing them to extract confessions. Sokiryanskaya and the founder of the NGO "Mothers of Dagestan" Svetlana Isayeva said that the bodies of three men killed in a late October 2008 police action and given to their families for burial had signs that the men had been tortured. More alarming to Memorial's representatives, however, has been the use of illegal detentions in order to create unlawful criminal proceedings against suspected militants. According to Orlov, illegal detentions have become part and parcel of the process of instituting false criminal proceedings against suspects. These detentions are not considered as abductions, since the suspects were released after a short period during which time law enforcement was able to create evidence against them in order to detain them indefinitely. Orlov said that as a result, statistics on abductions in Dagestan will probably decrease this year, giving the false impression of an improved human rights situation there.

15. (SBU) Isayeva stated that the current situation in Dagestan is a "civil war" in which someone -- a member of law enforcement organs, suspected insurgents or innocent civilians -- dies every day. She and others said that the situation there is exacerbated by the clan structure and traditional society that requires retribution for the death of or injury to family members. She recounted an instance in which the uncle of a young man killed a police officer after his nephew was tortured and sexually abused while in police custody. (Note: After Isayeva said that in such cases retribution was justified, Orlov quickly stated that Memorial believed that judicial proceedings are the only means for punishing police brutality. End Note).

#### Local Government Response is Oddly Familiar

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16. (C) The response by Dagestan president Mukhu Aliyev to the violence and the actions of law enforcement has been reminiscent of that of recently replaced Ingushetiya president Murat Zyazikov. Aliyev, who replaced Magomedali Magomedov who left office as head of Dagestan's State Council in February 2006, taking the title of president, has claimed that western influences are the cause of Dagestan's ills. Earlier this year he stated that NGOs working in Dagestan were agents of Western secret services. According to Memorial, the government launched a campaign to discredit Mothers of Dagestan in the Spring 2008. Newspapers quoting anonymous law enforcement sources claimed that the group had links with militants and law enforcement officials reportedly threatened members of the NGO with criminal prosecution. Isayeva told us privately that government officials, including the local ombudsman, refuse to meet with her.

17. (SBU) At the November 20 conference on extremism, Aliyev went a step further and claimed that active interference in the North Caucasus by "Western and other foreign countries" brought about the rise of extremism, nationalism and separatism in Dagestan. Memorial's Sokiryanskaya said that unlike in Chechnya, where president Ramzan Kadyrov has largely succeeded in establishing control over law enforcement, Aliyev does not enjoy similar powers in Dagestan.

#### Comment

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18. (C) While he may have been the Kremlin's answer to Dagestan's complex ethnic and clan structure when he was selected in 2006, Aliyev will have to do better to control the simmering violence and increased scrutiny of the human rights community if he is to avoid the same fate of Ingushetiya's Murat Zyazikov.

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